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Former Star Editor Denies Closedown Effort Under Way

By Stephen J. Lynton
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A story published on the front page of Saturday's Washington Star reporting that the newspaper's directors are apparently trying to close it down has prompted a denial from the paper's former editor.

Newbold Noyes, who recently stepped down after 11 years as the Star's editor but has remained a director of the financially troubled paper, acknowledged, nevertheless, that there are "differences of opinion" among its stockholders over how much money they "can afford to bet" on the Star's future.

Yesterday the Star published a report written by The New York Times and supplied to the Star by the Times' news service under the front-page headline, "Corporate Rift Is Reported in Ownership of Star Co."

The account said a "struggle" was under way between Joe L. Allbritton, the Star's new publisher, and the controlling members of the paper's boards of directors. It said Allbritton was fighting to save the newspaper but other directors "apparently want to close it."

James G. Bellows, who was named to succeed Noyes as editor last December, said yesterday that he had made the decision to publish the article and had not cleared it with the newspaper's owners.

Bellows said he could not "vouch for" the accuracy of the Times report and did not independently try to confirm it. He decided the story should be published, Bellows said, because the Times is a "reputable" newspaper with some circulation in the Washington area and because the article was of interest to Washington readers, especially readers of the Star.

JOE L. ALLBRITTON
. . . fighting to save paper

The Star plans to print Noyes' reply to the Times account as a letter to the editor in today's editions. Noyes, a vice president, director and consultant to the paper and its parent company, Washington Star Communications, Inc., said yesterday he was speaking only for himself but was "familiar" with the views of the other directors.

In his reply Noyes said, "The New York Times story appearing on the front page of yesterday's Star suggesting that members of the Noyes, Kauffmann and Adams families on the Star company boards of directors are trying to close the newspaper is grossly false and unfair. On the contrary, the effort of all members of the boards, old and new, is and always has been to save the paper."

But he added, "There are, of course, differences of opinion as to how this best can be accomplished and how much stockholders with varying resources can afford to bet on the outcome."

Allbritton, the Texas millionaire who took over as the Star's publisher last year, could not be reached for comment and a Houston associate said he was unfamiliar with the news account or the reported dispute. Many details in the news story could not immediately be confirmed.

Yesterday's story reported a disagreement over a $5 million, 10-year loan said to have been negotiated by Allbritton with Aetna Life & Casualty Co. The directors indicated they would not agree to guarantee the loan, the article said.

Asked about the report, Noyes said, "That is all screwed up and doesn't make any sense at all—and isn't true." He would say only that a proposed loan was under consideration but had not been acted on by the directors.

A reliable source, who asked not to be identified, confirmed that the proposed loan was for $5 million and was with Aetna.

Several Star staff writers, interviewed yesterday, said they accepted the report as largely accurate. "Bellows certainly would know what the situation is down there and I can't see him putting a story in that misrepresented Allbritton's point of view," said a reporter who asked not to be identified.

Some Star reporters viewed the story's publication as linked with internal problems. They described it as an apparent attempt by Allbritton's allies to squelch unconfirmed rumors suggesting that a crucial decision over the Star's finances was imminent. These rumors abounded last week, they said.

The Star has recently taken steps to ease its financial problems, including shifting it Newspaper Guild employees to a four-day work week. Much of its financial future appears to ride on a pending Federal Communications Commission ruling on whether the newspaper's owners may retain control of three profitable television stations.